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The six hundred and first meeting of the Club was held, in conjunction with the B.O.U., on Tuesday, 16th October, 1962.

Check-list of birds of the world

Volume XV, edited by Ernst Mayr and James C. Greenway, Jr., has been published by the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard University, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts. Price \$7.⁵⁰.

This volume contains the Ploceidae, Sturnidae, Oriolidae, Dicruridae, Callaeidae, Grallinidae, Artamidae, Cisticolidae, Ptilonorhynchidae, Paradisaeidae and Corvidae.

Geographical variation in the Fiscal Flycatcher *Melaenornis silens* (Shaw) of South Africa

by WALTER J. LAWSON

Received 29th January, 1962

The Fiscal Flycatcher *Melaenornis silens* (Shaw), which has hitherto been regarded as being monotypic, is peculiar to southern Africa, being found in the Cape Province, south-eastern Bechuanaland Protectorate, Orange Free State, Basutoland (lowlands), the Transvaal, and Natal and Zululand. In winter the eastern highveld populations tend to move to lower altitudes, during which time the species occurs in the eastern littoral plain of Zululand and southern Mocambique. It apparently does not extend into Southern Rhodesia.

This species is currently placed in the monotypic genus *Sigelus* Cabanis, or otherwise in *Bradornis* A. Smith, but in so far as the generic placing of this singular flycatcher is concerned, I prefer to follow the views of Vaurie (*vide Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, vol. 100, part 4, 1953, pp. 457-538) in merging *Sigelus* into *Melaenornis* Gray, which results in the nomenclatural combination of the Fiscal Flycatcher becoming *Melaenornis silens* (Shaw).

In the topotypical populations of *M. silens* described in 1809 from Knysna, southern Cape Province, on a Levaillant reference, the males of this flycatcher have the upper parts, ear-coverts and wings a glossy blue-black, and the lower throat, breast sides of the body and flanks silky white,

strongly suffused with light smoke grey, this especially marked over the breast and lateral surfaces of the body.

On study of a reasonably adequate series of skins of this species assembled at the Durban Museum it became evident that the Fiscal Flycatcher was not lacking in geographical variation, the populations being divisible into two quite satisfactory subspecific categories on the basis of the coloration of the under parts of adults in fresh dress. In brief, it was ascertained that in the populations occurring to the north of the Orange River in the northern Cape Province, south-eastern Bechuanaland Protectorate, dry western Orange Free State, and the western Transvaal, the males lacked much of the clear grey suffusion over the breast and lateral surfaces of the body of the southern birds, which areas were distinctly whiter and more buffish tinged.

In selecting a name for the newly characterized taxon I have experienced some little difficulty, but of the several names available in synonymy, *Bradyornis leucomelas* Sundevall, 1850: *Caffraria superiore*, appears applicable, being based on material collected by Sundevall's compatriot J. A. Wahlberg in the 1840's, probably at a place called Mohapoani, in the Rustenburg district of the western Transvaal, where Wahlberg got most of his upper Caffrarian material. Enquiries made of Dr Gustav. Rudebeck, now Curator of Birds at the Naturhistoriska Riksmuseum, Stockholm, as to the applicability of Sundevall's *B. leucomelas* for the new subspecies has to date failed to elicit a reply, and it may be that when data on the relevant Sundevall *Type* in the museum at Stockholm become available a change in name may be required. In the meantime, I propose to designate the northern race of the Fiscal Flycatcher *M. s. leucomelas* Sundevall, 1850, fixing the type-locality as Mohapoani, Rustenburg district, western Transvaal.

The nomenclature, characters and ranges of the two races of the Fiscal Flycatcher are as follows:

(a) *Melaenornis silens silens* (Shaw).

Lanius silens Shaw, *General Zoology* vol. vii, 2, 1809, p. 330: Knysna, southern Cape Province, ex Levaillant, *Hist. Nat. Ois. d.Afr.*, vol. ii, 1799, p. 103, pl. 74.

Diagnosis: Characterized by having, in the adult male in freshly moulted dress, a heavy suffusion of smoke-grey over breast and lateral surfaces of the under parts.

Measurements: 10♂♂ wing 93.0–99.5 (96.4); tail 81.0–83.0 (81.8); culmen 19.0–21.0 (19.5); 10♀♀ wing 90.5–94.0 (91.9); tail 74.0–79.0 (76.7); culmen 18.0–20.5 (19.3) mm.

Material: 101 (Cape Province 77, Orange Free State 14, Natal 6, Swaziland 2, eastern Transvaal 1, southern Mocambique 1).

Range: Cape Province south of the Orange River, except in the arid north-western districts, where the species is absent, the eastern highveld of the Orange Free State, the lowlands of Basutoland, the southern and eastern Transvaal, and Natal and Zululand. Absent from the lower midlands and coast of Natal and the eastern littoral of Zululand, but present there and in eastern Swaziland, the eastern lowveld of the Transvaal and southern Mocambique as a non-breeding visitor during the period May–September.

Remarks: In worn plumage the grey suffusion tends to disappear and the feathers of the chest become soil stained, and under such conditions a

specimen of the nominate race may occasionally resemble to some extent a freshly moulted specimen of the following taxon.

(b) *Melaenornis silens leucomelas* (Sundevall), new race *Bradyornis leucomelas* Sundevall, *Oefv. K. Sv. Vet. Akad. Förhandl.*, vol. vii, 1850, p. 106: *Caffraria superiore*. Type locality here restricted to Mohapoani, Rustenburg district, western Transvaal.

Diagnosis: Differs from the nominate race, as defined above, in lacking in the adult male the strong smoke-grey suffusion to the breast and lateral surfaces of the under parts, this being largely replaced by a light buffish-grey overlay to the predominantly white under parts. Averaging a little smaller in size.

Measurements: 9♂♂ wing 93.0–99.5 (95.7); tail 76.5–83.0 (79.6); culmen 18.0–19.5 (18.5); 4♀♀ wing 89.5–92.0 (90.9); tail 71.0–74.5 (72.5); culmen 18.0–19.5 (18.5) mm.

Material: 25 (northern Cape Province 9, western Orange Free State 2, Transvaal 4, Bechuanaland Protectorate 8, Zululand 1, Swaziland 1.)

Range: Cape Province north of the Orange River, the dry western Orange Free State, the western Transvaal and the eastern Bechuanaland Protectorate. Occasionally ranging into northern Zululand, Mocambique and Swaziland during winter as a non-breeding visitor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the loan of series of the Fiscal Flycatcher I am deeply indebted to the Directors of the following museums: South African Museum, Cape Town (through Dr. J. M. Winterbottom); East London Museum; Transvaal Museum; and the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo (through Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin.) I am also grateful to Mr. P. A. Clancey for looking at the assembled material with me and for assistance in other ways, and to Dr. J. M. Winterbottom, Director of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, Cape Town, for his assistance with the early literature concerning this species.

A new *Cossypha* from Kenya

by G. JOHN WILLIAMS

Received 6th March, 1962

During January–February, 1962 Mr. John R. M. Tennent undertook a brief collecting trip to the mist forest on Mt. Endau, Kitui District, Kenya, on behalf of the Coryndon Museum, Nairobi.

Among the birds he obtained is a series of six specimens (5 adults and 1 immature) of a distinct new race of *Cossypha natalensis*.

I have pleasure in naming this bird

Cossypha natalensis tennentii Subsp. nov.

in honour of Mr. John R. M. Tennent who has added much to our knowledge of local birds during his service in Kenya.

Description: *Cossypha natalensis tennentii* differs from all other known races in having the underparts, head, back, rump and tail much paler and yellower (*light cadmium* Ridgway) with only a slight trace of rufous wash.

Type: Adult male (Collector's No. 63). Loc. Mist forest, Mt. Endau, Kitui District, Kenya. 3,400 ft. 25th January, 1962: Collector J. R. M. Tennent; in mist net. The Type and a paratype female will be deposited in the collection of the British Museum (Natural History).